

African print textile value chains during the time of Covid-19

MANCHESTER
1824
The University of Manchester
Global Development Institute

Working Paper Series
Beletchei Ebia
2023-064 | April 2023



ISBN: 978-1-912607-22-8

Beletchei Ebia

PhD candidate, Global Development Institute, University of Manchester

Beletchei.ebia@manchester.ac.uk

Cite this paper as

Ebia, Beletchei. (2023) African print textile value chains during the time of Covid-19. GDI Working Paper 2023-064. Manchester: The University of Manchester.

Abstract

Much of the emerging literature about global value chains (GVCs) during Covid-19 has focused on the challenges faced by North–South value chains, among them supply chain rigidity and stock shortages. Relatively little work has documented how South–South chains have responded to the crisis. My research attempts to fill this gap through a case study of African print textile (APT) value chains, focusing on those which originate in China and extend to West Africa. I suggest that these South–South chains' flexible mode of governance has enabled them to adapt to and withstand the shock of the pandemic. When cloth traders in Lomé, Togo, lost their domestic market, because petty street vendors had disappeared and lines of credit become exhausted, they turned to cross-border trade, initiating a new set of regional trade networks. Improvising again, they began to rely more on informal trade than before, in order to extend their networks and convey their product across borders. Both adaptations – the turn to cross-border trade and a greater reliance on the informal – are likely to become enduring features of these trader-driven South–South chains. Analytically, the paper argues that the flexibility of trader-governed GVCs has an advantage over lead firm-directed chains in adapting to market turbulence in a Southern context, and that scholars of value chains ought to pay closer attention to the under-studied governance structure of such chains.

Keywords

GVCs, governance, Global South, Covid-19

JEL Codes

J46, O17, O55

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank the members of my PhD committee, Emeritus Professor Stephanie Barrientos, Dr Rory Horner and Professor Tanja Bastia, for their unfailing support and guidance, and their inspired commentary on this paper.

Image source

Photo by Hrecheniuk Oleksii from Canva Pro.

1. Introduction

A central focus of the emerging literature on Covid-19 and global value chains (GVCs) has been on challenges faced by GVC actors in responding to the pandemic, and on actions that might make them more agile and resilient. While important insights have been advanced in diagnosing North–South value chain strengths and weaknesses – among the latter, their just-in-time (JIT) structure, which offers advantages during non-pandemic times but which leaves them with limited supply during times of crisis (Gereffi, 2021) – this literature (see Section 2) has largely failed to explore South–South value chain resilience or to analyse the response of South–South value chain actors to the pandemic. In so doing, it reproduces a long-standing leaning in the GVC literature towards the study of North–South chains, while neglecting those operating within the Global South.

This paper attempts to fill that gap by addressing the following research question: How did African print textile (APT) value chain actors adapt to the challenges of Covid, and what are the implications for value chain governance? In particular, it documents the way in which APT traders in Togo, West Africa, reacted to interruptions in their business and the loss of their domestic market as a result of measures introduced by the Togolese state to limit the spread of the virus and because client liquidity evaporated (Gnamke, 2020; Wague, 2020). These traders responded by turning to cross-border trade to make up the shortfall (Baoua, 2020; Bisson & Hambleton, 2020; Mbaye & Diagne, 2020). As a result of this strategic choice, a more regionalised set of chain segments emerged which have endured beyond the pandemic. At the same time, traders came to rely increasingly on informal trade (Mbaye & Diagne, 2020) to convey their merchandise across borders.

Analytically, the paper addresses a larger question for value chain theory. It explores not only how West African APT markets were restructured during Covid-19 but also the implications of that restructuring for value chain governance. My argument will be that trader-driven APT chains have an inbuilt flexibility that lent them resilience during the pandemic, a resilience that North–South APT chains lack. This finding has implications for theorising GVC governance more broadly.

The paper draws on 12 months of participant observation and qualitative interviews in 2020 and 2021 in the cloth markets of Togo's capital, Lomé. I conducted 37 interviews with different large traders, another 60 with secondary traders and street sellers, and 17 with port agents, brokers, textile-company bosses and state officials. These interviews were supplemented by quantitative data on cloth imports from Togolese state archives and secondary sources. While these interviews focused on the broader restructuring of

the APT market and implications of these shifts for value chain governance, they took place during the Covid-19 pandemic. I thus also examined the ongoing impact and restructuring of this market as a result of the crisis, by visiting markets that were still open and by having conversations with traders to learn about their response to market disruption. The research was conducted at different stages during the first 18 months of the pandemic, which gave me a view of how the APT market was evolving over time.

Section 2 provides an overview of a GVC analytical approach and of recent literature on the relationship between GVCs and Covid-19. Section 3 describes in greater detail the methodology I used in studying APT GVCs. Section 4 provides context as to the impact of Covid-19 on the social and commercial life of Togo. Section 5 explores the new regime of value chains that has emerged from the pandemic, with a focus on regionalism and the informal sector. Section 6 returns to the issue of governance and suggests that the pandemic provided a privileged view into the flexibility and advantages of trader-driven governance in Global South value chains. The paper concludes by summarising the article's findings and suggests the value of a more sustained focus on South–South chains for GVC governance.

2 Global value chains during the time of Covid-19

2.1 GVC analytical approach

There is a significant emerging literature about the effects of Covid-19 on GVCs, for example Anner (2020), Bamber et al (2020), Dallas et al (2021), Fortunato (2020), Gereffi (2020, 2021) and Santacreu and Labelle (2021). This literature, importantly, focuses on the challenges faced by GVCs in responding to the pandemic and proposes strategies that could make them more agile and resilient. However, it is largely focused on North–South chains governed by Northern lead firms and fails to analyse the challenges to and responses of South–South value chains during the pandemic. I summarise the findings of this emergent literature in this section, after briefly introducing the concept of the GVC, with a particular focus on governance. I then describe some of its gaps, which I aim to begin to fill in this paper.

Scholarly analysis of GVCs emerged at the end of the 20th century, at a time when commodity manufacture was migrating from the Global North to the Global South and when GVCs had become central to the organisation of the global economy. These GVCs are governed by firms with headquarters in the North who nevertheless exert control over the entire chain of inputs, including agro-processing and manufacture in the South. GVC scholarship examined the governance role of these 'lead firms' and the way in which they exerted power within North–South GVCs (Gereffi, 2018; Gereffi et al,

2005) and, in contrast, what possibilities existed for the amelioration or 'upgrading' of the wage and working conditions of low-level actors along the chain (Barrientos et al, 2011; Gereffi, 1999, 2018, 2019; Gereffi et al, 2005; Gibbon, 2008; Morris et al, 2011; Ponte et al, 2019).

Early on, Gereffi (1994a) developed an important distinction for describing modes of governance, differentiating between producer- and buyer-driven value chains, with the latter governed by lead firms or big buyers. These firms are typically located in the Global North and coordinate the chain, while accumulating large benefits from the control they exert (see Gereffi, 2001; Gereffi et al, 2005; Kaplinsky, 2000; Humphrey & Schmitz, 2001; Morris et al, 2011). This binary framework was given further nuance through a typology that characterised the diverse relationships between suppliers and lead firms – hierarchical, captive, modular, relational and market (Gereffi et al, 2005). I find these terms useful in analysing the two value chains examined below, although the features of the South–South (China–Togo) value chain also exceed the meaning Gereffi et al (2005) gave them.

More recent GVC scholarship has further parsed the concept of governance through a distinction between private and public governance. Private governance is private-sector-driven – lead-firm-driven, in the case of GVCs – while public governance refers to the influence of state and civil society (NGO) controls on value chains, including the imposition of labour and environmental standards. The notion of public governance, however, extends beyond standards to include all state and civil society actions that affect GVC production and distribution (Barrientos, 2019). During the Covid-19 pandemic in Togo, for instance, the restrictions the Togolese state put in place to interdict intercity travel and cross-border traffic were public governance measures that affected APT circulation and sales.

A significant gap in the GVC and governance literatures, which I address in greater detail below, concerns the way in which value chain governance articulates with informal economies. This is especially true in Africa, where informal enterprise constitutes up to 80% of economic activity in most countries (ILO, 2018a, 2018c; Medina et al, 2017). The GVC literature focuses almost exclusively on formal economic activity, on activities taxed and regulated by the state. But such a focus ignores all those small one- and two-person informal enterprises that proliferate across the African continent and, in the case of APT and many South–South value chains, provide crucial distribution and manufacturing functions. In this region, formal and informal economies are interlinked and mutually influence one another, a fact which has important implications for APT governance.

2.2 Value chains during the time of Covid-19

A central theme in the GVC Covid literature has been whether pandemic supply chain shortages were caused by GVC weaknesses – rigidities or structural flaws in supply chains themselves (Friedberg, 2020; Lighthizer, 2020) – or by policy interference. An article by Gereffi (2020) focused on the effects of the pandemic on supply chains of Covid-related medical equipment (personal protective equipment (PPE) – face masks and respirators) and concluded that it was largely policy, not value chain structure, that was responsible for shortages in supply. In particular, he blamed the rise of protectionism or ‘economic nationalism’ for the failure of supply chains in the US to deliver needed PPE. At the same time, Gereffi (2020, 2021) acknowledged that PPE value chains were ill-adapted to the ramp-up required during pandemic times and suggested that, to meet future challenges and make value chains more resilient (‘anti-fragile’), they ought to be diversified and become more regionally focused. Moreover, he suggested that those chains which remain globally dispersed, such as the recently popular JIT GVCs, which reduce inventory and free up liquidity for lead firms, will require modification in order to handle crisis conditions.

Other scholars and policy analysts (Fortunato, 2020; Santacreu & LaBelle, 2021; UNCTAD, 2020) have similarly suggested that Covid is producing greater state intervention and regulation, and may lead to a ‘re-shoring’ of GVCs, to more regionalism, and to greater value chain diversification. Thus, Santacreu and Labelle (2021) highlight the way in which Covid exposed weaknesses in GVCs – an increase in shipping costs, protectionist trade measures and export restrictions, state-imposed virus containment policies – and produced supply shortages, and suggest re-shoring and value chain diversification as possible options. At the same time, they recognise that re-shoring would increase costs and run into the obstacle that certain materials are locality-specific. However, many GVC scholars take the anti-protectionist view that turning inward would be short-sighted and ineffective (Baldwin & Evenett, 2020; Oldekop et al, 2020), and caution that, before making changes to policy, value chains ought to be differentiated according to whether they served crisis or non-crisis needs, whether they were money-making or not (Nachum, 2021), and more generally what concrete issues firms faced during the crisis, before deciding what policies might be appropriate to solving them (Miroudot, 2020).

In this spirit, an important intervention in the GVC Covid-19 literature is found in an article by Dallas, Horner and Li (Dallas et al, 2021), who provide an empirically driven analysis of the interplay between states and GVCs during the early phases of the pandemic in 2020. They warn against falling into the trap of a failure/success binary (of good GVCs and bad states, or vice versa) and instead suggest that states and GVCs

have mutually influenced and constrained one another – and have done so in different ways during different phases of the pandemic. They also urge a product-specific focus in examining the state–GVC question.

Indeed, the effects (and causes) of product shortages are not yet clear and remain inconsistent across case studies. While China reduced the export of PPE in order to satisfy domestic needs (Brown, 2020) – turning inwards to produce essential goods, especially medical devices (Bamber et al, 2020), a common response of national policy makers everywhere – Malaysia, by contrast, increased the production and export of medical rubber gloves, although to the detriment of worker conditions (Hutchinson & Bhattacharya, 2020). Another response to heightened US demand for N95 face masks and surgical gowns (Hufford, 2020) led some Chinese companies, many of them newly created (Liu, 2020), to match demand by producing PPE of inferior quality (despite advertising it otherwise), with the consequence that surgeries had to be cancelled (Lappok, 2020). In short, the effects of value chain restructuring to meet crisis conditions were by no means uniform, and there remains much unsupported speculation in this literature as to how GVCs affected and were affected by the pandemic, with little empirical confirmation about what occurred.

An article by Anner (2020) on garment supply chain factories in Bangladesh raises the important issue of the impact of the pandemic on GVC labour in the Global South. Anner’s research suggests that Covid has had a strong negative effect on Bangladeshi factory workers, with many factories shutting down and millions of workers laid off. This impact on Global South labour also suggests that, if a re-shoring of global production to the metropole were to occur as a result of GVC reconfiguring after the pandemic, developing countries would lose factories and revenue (Gereffi, 2021) and would potentially face an even greater developmental challenge than they do already.

Anner’s much-needed worker perspective on Covid’s effect on GVCs, a perspective whose focus on Global South producers is missing in much of the rest of the literature (although see Barlow et al, 2021) is nevertheless still situated within North–South chains governed by lead firms. Where, in all this emerging literature, is a focus on South–South value chains during the pandemic, especially at a moment when South–South trade has surpassed that of North–South trade globally (Horner & Nadvi, 2018; Oldekop et al, 2020; Pasquali et al, 2021)?

A rare exception to the Covid GVC literature’s strong focus on North–South chains is work by Pasquali and Godfrey (2021) on two contrasting South–South textile chains in southern Africa. They found that textile value chains that exercised a form of “direct” lead firm governance had an advantage during the pandemic over smaller chains that

relied on “indirect” governance by small-scale intermediaries and “design houses.” Producers in the latter experienced greater “downgrading,” namely salary reduction, loss of protections and job loss (Pasquali & Godfrey, 2021, p 3).¹

While not always explicitly stated in the literature, governance issues lie at the centre of discussions of GVCs and Covid. This is true not only in the work of Pasquali and Godfrey, where governance *is* a central theme, but also in the articles on value chain response to the pandemic, where lead firm decision making remains critical. Moreover, the role of public governance is implicated throughout this literature, for example in discussions of state influence on supply chains during the pandemic, evidenced by the terms ‘policy interference’, ‘protectionism’ and ‘economic nationalism’.

My own research takes up the issue of governance in South–South chains during the pandemic. It focuses on the way in which West African value chain actors not only suffered during the pandemic but also adapted in ways that are likely to have lasting effects on value chain structure and governance. Among these novelties was an increasing reliance on the informal sector, a domain largely ignored by GVC scholarship, and on illegal cross-border trade. The pandemic also provided further evidence that the type of trader-driven governance typical of Southern value chains enables a flexibility that serves well in times of crisis, a flexibility which a more structurally rigid lead firm is unlikely to be able to offer.

3 Data and methodology

This paper examines APT value chains in the Togolese market, with a special focus on traders, especially those wealthy ‘Nana-Benz’ traders² who sell Dutch APT for the Vlisco company, and ‘Nanette’ traders who travel to China to purchase cloth for resale in Togo. Traders in these two value chains, the Dutch North–South textile chain and the Chinese South–South chain, compete with one another in Lomé’s cloth markets, which have been a major hub of APT imports into West Africa since the colonial period. Much

¹ There is a substantial emerging literature on the impact of the pandemic on gendered labour and informal work in the Global South (for example, Resnick et al, 2020; Chen et al, 2021; Kabeer et al, 2021). Among other topics, this literature examines the impact of Covid on different sectors or ‘channels’ of informal work (Chen et al, 2021) and concludes that informal work generally, especially women’s informal labour, was disproportionately affected by the health crisis. Much of this work comes from policy studies and, while important, little of it focuses on GVCs or on the main focus of this paper, the intersection of GVCs and Covid.

² They are called Nana-Benz because of the automobiles they were able to purchase with the wealth earned from trading Dutch cloth.

of my research has focused on the intersection of, and competition between, these two value chains in the Lomé market and on the role traders play in value chain governance

I arrived in Lomé, Togo's capital, in December 2019, just before the onset of Covid-19, and remained there until September 2021. Even though the Togolese state put restrictions in place in March 2020, including the mandatory wearing of facemasks, an interdiction on intercity travel, the closing of the border with its three neighbouring countries, a nightly curfew, a prohibition on gatherings in public places – all public governance measures – I was able to circulate, albeit cautiously, during the pandemic and conduct interviews for my research.

While I was able to acquire trade data from the Togolese state about annual revenue on imports from The Netherlands and China, the two major sources of cloth in this market, these figures are nevertheless incomplete. I was also unable to acquire quantitative data from the Vlisco company, the main importer of European APT. The company is highly protective of its business and suggested that I consult a company book about the history of APT in The Netherlands.

In the face of these challenges on the quantitative side of data collection, my research relied primarily on qualitative interview data, with a focus on trader networks and trader decision making and strategy. These interviews were semi-structured (Edwards & Holland, 2013; Given, 2008) and relied on prior informed consent. I also engaged in participant observation (Bernard, 2002; Kawulich, 2005) – sitting in traders' boutiques, listening to their conversations and observing how they conducted trade, helping them unload and stack bundles of cloth, circulating in the markets and on the street – and was able to learn broadly about market activities, including the workings of Lomé's vast informal sector.

Over the course of 12 months, I conducted 97 interviews with Togolese traders and street sellers of APT, and another 17 interviews with port agents and brokers, and with textile-company and state officials (see Appendix 1). In several cases, I engaged in multiple interviews with key interlocutors, especially a few large traders in the Lomé market. Some of these interviews were in-person, while others took place on the social media site WhatsApp. All interviews were conducted in Ewe or French, both native languages for me, with notes written up following each interview. I was unable to record the interviews, because of trader worries that, if recorded, their secrets might more easily be passed to others. They nevertheless were happy to talk to me and were fully informed that I was conducting research on the APT market for a PhD at The University of Manchester.

A primary focus of these interviews was on recent shifts in the APT market, especially the intersection of North–South (Dutch) and South–South (Chinese) value chains, and on the implications of these shifts for value chain governance. I also studied the effects of Covid-19 on traders and the market. I thus visited markets that remained open and had conversations with traders to better understand their response to the pandemic. Throughout this time, I kept a journal of interviews and observations about market adaptation to Covid. I also lived on a street near the Ghanaian border, where informal traders lined up to cross ‘beneath the fences’ (illegally), and was able to learn much about informal cross-border trade during the pandemic.

This was a time during which the informal economy, already the largest source of employment in this economically precarious region with over 80% of workers operating in it (Benjamin et al, 2015; ILO, 2018b, 2018c), expanded even more. It was also a time when even the largest and most successful traders, who have long operated with one foot in the formal sphere and the other in the informal, turned to the informal market more than before. One of the most visible indicators of informal expansion during the pandemic was the proliferation of cross-border smuggling, which emerged in response to the closing of the official border and reduced tariffs and other costs for cloth traders, thereby sweetening the attractions of cross-border trade. Here, then, is an example of the way in which, under Covid (in the face of the state’s restrictions on movement), public governance, namely governmental control of economic activity, was effectively diminished.

4 Context: Covid-19 and West African markets

Liberal inter-state trade has long been a defining characteristic of West Africa, a feature turned into policy by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), whose remit is to support trade and economic integration across the region (Garba & Yeboah, 2022; Ikechi et al, 2022; Okolo, 1988). Globalisation in the 1990s brought a cascade of new manufactured products to these countries, many from China – imports that became divided by speciality among the countries of the West African sub-region. Thus, Cote d’Ivoire is known for trade in cosmetics, Ghana for trade in plastic ware and local textiles, Benin for jewellery, Nigeria for household electronics, machines and pharmaceuticals, and Togo for textiles and second-hand cars.

Trade in these commodities constitutes the main source of jobs and informal sector activities (Benjamin et al, 2015; Bensassi et al, 2019) throughout the urban areas of this region. While some informal vendors buy and sell in the cities and remain within national borders, others cross the border to purchase products before returning to sell them in their home country or, in reverse, taking products from their own country to

sell elsewhere. This proliferation of trade relations and its division of labour defines the region, and the interconnected and complementary nature of trade between national territories not only makes them dependent on one another for survival but also structures the supply and demand of commodities throughout the region.

With the arrival of the pandemic in March 2020, West African countries closed their borders and interdicted intercity travel. In Togo's case, there was a succession of lockdowns, the first of which lasted for three months, from April to July 2020. During this time, in the capital, Lomé, the main stores and shops in the large central market of Assigamé were closed, with several million urban sellers forced out of business and deprived of expected income.

Although some urban sellers resumed their activities after the initial lockdown was over, many were not able to return to former trading activities because of the ban on intercity travel and the closing of the border. Nightly curfews also remained in place and imported goods became scarce. Nevertheless, immediate needs had to be addressed, especially food needs, but also the need for face masks and products related to the spread of the disease. A thriving industry of face-mask manufacture emerged at this time, cloth masks made with APT that were sold for 20 US cents. Togolese also repurposed Ghanaian (Chinese) plastic buckets with foot-tap water pumps that enabled people to clean their hands with soap or sanitiser before entering offices, shops or markets. These repurposed buckets sold for anywhere from \$4 to \$10, depending on their volume.

In sum, the months of lockdown were a time of privation and cutback, and of serious problems of liquidity and cash flow. However, during these difficult months, street sellers and informal actors, unable to wait until the end of the lockdown, slowly returned to trading. Since it was they who sold the products which people needed, especially food, it was they who drove the reopening of the markets and the return to pre-pandemic life. Thus, while still respecting the measures put in place for Covid-19 protection, it was because of petty street sellers that the markets began to open again. By the end of this period, even the large traders – those among whom I was conducting research – were back in business and were operating more than ever outside the regulations laid down by the Togolese state.

While there is much more to say about this time of pandemic and its effects on the Togolese and their markets, my interest here is to draw a tight connection between sellers–traders and the pandemic. It was they, as informal traders, constituting 80% of the Togolese working population and who depended for their livelihoods on the movement of products through markets and across borders, who were the hardest hit

by the interdictions of the pandemic. But it was also they who led the exit from the pandemic and the return to normal life (trade).

5 Impacts of Covid on the APT trade in West Africa: a Togolese case study

African Print Textiles, the clothing of choice for most West Africans on special and many everyday occasions, are supplied to the West African market by two value chains, one from Europe (The Netherlands), the other from Asia (China). As mentioned above, the main distributors of APT in West Africa are Togolese traders, with those who distribute for the Dutch company Group Vlisco known as Nana-Benz and those who distribute Chinese-manufactured cloth known as Nanettes (little Nanas).

The APT market was especially hard hit during the pandemic. Local consumption (purchase) of cloth used on special occasions – marriages, naming ceremonies, funerals, church services – decreased dramatically because public gatherings were suspended by the state. Lockdown also led to a closing of the borders, which seriously affected cloth traders, many of whom had clients on the other side of the frontier.

In what follows, I focus on the response to pandemic conditions of value chain actors in these two cloth chains, the North–South (Dutch) chain and the South–South (Chinese) chain, conditions defined by restrictions placed on trade at this time. The data show that the lead-firm-directed Dutch chain struggled to retain its market, while the trader-driven Chinese chain was able to adapt and find new markets. These findings suggest that trader-driven governance may be superior to lead-firm governance in this Southern context.

In what follows, I begin by describing the North–South chain, because that chain stagnated during the pandemic, before describing the South–South chain, which had an easier time adapting to crisis conditions. The parameters of North–South stagnation are key to understanding how the South–South chain was able to survive and in some cases flourish.

5.1 The Dutch North–South value chain

Vlisco: a company unable to adapt to the pandemic

During Covid-19, the pivot of the Dutch value chain in Lomé, the lead firm Group Vlisco, remained open and operational, though with difficulty. This firm has supplied cloth made in The Netherlands to the West African market since the colonial period and has long dominated the prestige end of that market. Its famous Togolese traders, Nana-Benz, were crucial intermediaries for the firm, keying Vlisco's product to local taste and pattern, giving it local names, then selling it for the firm on the street.

In the mid-2000s, in response to competition from Chinese-manufactured APT, whose imitation Vlisco sold at one-tenth of the cost of Dutch Wax, Vlisco decided to consolidate control of its value chain by hierarchically integrating it and diminishing the role of its famous traders. Thus, leading up to the pandemic, it was distributing cloth on a fixed schedule (one container per month) from its boutiques in West African capitals (Lomé, Accra, Abidjan, Cotonou, Lagos) through a small and diminished number (20) of Nana-Benz traders, who were required to follow strict rules of sale. Pricing was (and remains) inflexible and dictated from above, and most secondary street vendors who were previously integrated into the Nana-Benz network were cut off.

During the initial months of the pandemic, from March to the end of 2020, Vlisco continued to inject new designs of Super Dutch APT every two months and of Block Dutch every four months, and its shop in the *Grand Marché* in Lomé remained open. While it remained difficult to get quantitative information about sales from this company, employees I interviewed said that Vlisco's sales had dramatically declined not only because the public's purchasing power had decreased during this time but also because of the ban on public gatherings and festivities, where Togolese like to exhibit high-prestige Dutch APT.

This decrease in sales was also a result of the rigidity of the rules imposed by Vlisco, the lead firm. Said rules govern Vlisco's business and that of their Togolese traders. The drop in sales also occurred because their prices remained fixed and high – catastrophic for a trader during a moment of economic crisis. In Vlisco's reasoning, according to Nanas I interviewed, if they allowed traders to diminish the price of Dutch Wax, their product would lose prestige and the market would become a sea of competing brands, with prices rising and falling beyond their control (interviews, OT-1, OT-2). Not only would Vlisco lose its margin of profit, Vlisco's product would also lose its special standing in the West African fashion market.

Nanas I spoke with pointed to the fact that Nanettes had more flexibility than they did in marketing their product. Some Nanas even began secretly giving patterns to Nanettes to manufacture and sell for them, reimbursing them under the table (see below).

Dutch APT traders attempt to adapt

During the first Lomé lockdown in 2020, the boutiques of Nana-Benz traders in Assigamé, where they sell Dutch APT after receiving it from Vlisco's main office, were

closed. One of my interviewees (NB-2), classified by Vlisco as a 'platinum trader',³ who had previously sold half a container every month, said it took her more than six months to sell that amount during the pandemic. In addition to a weak domestic market, Nanas were hurt by the fact that the borders were closed and there were few buyers who came to Lomé from across the larger sub-region.

A few Nana-Benz traders became inventive during this time and reintroduced old designs to the market, a process known as '*regravure*' (re-engraving), by commissioning manufacturers to reprint old Vlisco designs. This was one of the few options open to Nanas, since Group Vlisco, the manufacturer, insists that Nana-Benzenes cannot sell APT products other than Dutch APT, which must be purchased directly from Vlisco. But the Nana who mentioned this strategy (NB-3) said that *regravure* was not as successful as she had imagined it might be, because the cost remained too high for pandemic budgets.

In addition to the process of reprinting, Nanas met the pandemic by beginning to work with Nanettes, an innovation that would have been unlikely only a few years before because of the intense competition between these traders. However, Nanettes became sellers and promoters for Nanas at this time because the former had access to West African buyers, many beyond the border, to whom they could sell on credit, later reimbursing the Nanas. Twelve Nanettes I interviewed were selling real Dutch APT (which they acquired from Nanas) to buyers in other countries.

Thanks to the autonomy and flexibility of the Nanette traders, Nana-Benz were able to sell their APT, something difficult for them to do on their own because of Vlisco rules, rules that prohibit such collaboration and the ruining of the market Vlisco thinks it will produce. This, then, was another adaptation to the Covid moment, here leading to the breaking of boundaries between these two competitive traders in the Assigamé market and producing greater connection between formal and informal GVC traders. It also produced a shift in governance regime towards greater informality and the avoidance of lead-firm and government regulation.

In sum, this North–South value chain was crippled by the rigidity of its lead-firm governance structure, which kept its traders tied to the firm by strict rules of sale. Its traders were unable to improvise like traders in the South–South chain.

5.2 The Chinese South–South value chain

³ Nana-Benz are divided into three groups according to their biannual sales. The most successful are platinum, followed by gold and silver.

A set of Chinese manufacturing firms lies at one end of this value chain. These manufacturers, however, are not lead firms; they simply fill the commissions of West African traders. While I was unable to interview employees at these Chinese firms, I was able to acquire information about them and about the overall structure of this value chain from Nanette traders.

Since the mid-2000s, Nanettes had begun travelling to East Asia, especially China, to buy APT and bring it back to Togo to distribute in national and sub-regional markets. Most of these traders report having a positive and hands-off relationship with their Chinese manufacturers – who fill Nanette traders' on-demand orders in return for cash. After the lockdown, these traders' activities continued but domestically APT became scarce and often untradeable. On the one hand, those who ordered cloth before the pandemic did not receive it on time – deliveries were late. On the other, the borders were closed, so that even those who had cloth in stock were unable to move it.

Long-term trade partnerships came to the aid of Nanettes and played an important role in keeping them and this value chain in business. Most Nanettes had bank accounts with credit histories, as well as credit histories with trade partners, both local and cross-border, West African and Chinese. These reputable credit histories enabled these traders to avoid going to China during the pandemic while continuing to order and receive goods.

In the following, I describe some of the main strategies used by Nanette traders at this time. These strategies were diverse, with different traders using different tactics to maintain their trade, which I take as an illustration of South–South APT value chain adaptability and flexibility.

Social media (WhatsApp): innovating strategy

During a time when things (merchandise) but not people were able to travel across borders, Nanettes reinvented themselves. How to order new patterns and keep the merchandise coming when they could no longer travel to China to select patterns and place their orders?

Of 25 Nanette traders I interviewed, ten reacted to their inability to travel by pivoting to ordering goods on their smart phones. Within the group of traders, there are two types, those Nanettes who order the common Chinese APT brands (Hitarget, Hitarget premium, Chiganviy, Chivi, ABC, Hollantex, Prestige and Sanhe), and those who own and market their own brands.

Within the first group, in order to procure APT goods from their customary Chinese supplier–manufacturers, they contacted these suppliers by WhatsApp, whereupon the

manufacturers would send them pictures of new designs, also by smart phone. After choosing the designs they wanted, Nanettes would send their orders to the factory. This would start a process of payment between banks at each end, with the Togolese bank transferring money to the Chinese supplier's bank. Pre-pandemic, it took six months to deliver an order but, during the pandemic, some orders took eight months (although, by pandemic standards, that was a quick turnaround) (interview, NN-1).

A similar process was followed by traders who had their own APT brands, although with some variation. One of these traders (NN-1) told me that, instead of selecting patterns designed by Chinese producers, she drew her own APT designs and chose the colours, often inspired by new Dutch (Vlisco) design colours. Then she sent her drawings to her Chinese partner–manufacturer through FedEx. Next, the Chinese manufacturer sent small images via phone to her of the finished textile for her approval, before proceeding to manufacture this APT.

The emergence of new value chain segments during the pandemic

Another challenge posed by Covid-19 to this trade was how to sell the product after it arrived, especially since Togolese consumers were short of liquidity and because, compared to Ivorians, Ghanaians and Nigerians, they are not big buyers. A major additional problem was that their customary sub-regional buyers had disappeared because the borders were closed. But at a certain point, still during the lockdown, these trading activities resumed, thanks to the informal market.

The national trend – avoiding risk

As mentioned, the informal sector in countries throughout West Africa employs up to 80% of workers, most in trading activities (Benjamin et al, 2015; Benjamin & Mbaye, 2012; Carr et al, 2002; Charmes, 2012; Meagher, 2007; Meagher & Lindell, 2013). Informal enterprises in Lomé are often single- or two-person businesses selling manufactured goods, often from China, on the street.

Before the pandemic, the sale of Chinese APT constituted an important source of revenue for thousands of Togolese informal street vendors, largely women, who do not need more than \$200 to start trading and who are able to subsist on this level of trade. In addition to these petty vendors, there are other value chain actors, namely tailors and seamstresses, who depend on the transformation of imported Chinese APT, as well as sellers of local garments made from APT in the markets. During the lockdown, most such activities stopped and this segment of the South–South value chain was seriously affected. But the ingenuity of these actors produced surprising levels of adaptability.

The first lockdown led to an important rise in sales of APT face masks. The tailors who sewed these face masks, typically male, remained fully employed and thus profited from the Togolese state's mask mandate. Unfortunately, there were winners and losers, as not all urban vendors were able to quickly convert their business into selling face masks. Also, this new business was short-lived, lasting only a few months until it was driven to the sidelines by imported face masks. As a consequence, many small sellers of APT switched to other businesses, mainly selling foodstuffs, to survive.

Soon, however, the Chinese APT chain resumed its activities, with Nanettes leading the way. In response to weak domestic consumption, they adapted to the situation by seeking new avenues of cross-border trade. Not all Nanettes followed, however. Some refused to take the risk of selling to unknown strangers, preferring instead to reduce the cost of their cloth and stay home, selling within national borders, thus effectively preferring to wait out the pandemic.

A Nanette I interviewed (NN-6) decided to avoid taking the risk of cross-border trade, because APT, unlike food, she told me, is not a perishable good and once the borders reopen she will be able to sell her cloth. She said that she preferred to sell property in Togo (she owns land and a house) in order to reimburse her cloth debts with the banks than to risk sending her goods to a buyer in another country who might disappear with her money.

The regional trend – taking new risks

There were two main regional methods or strategies used by Nanette traders to sell their goods when the domestic market disappeared. The first was by passing through longstanding and reliable client-buyers across the border; the second was for traders to take the risk of sending goods to largely unknown client-buyers in neighbouring countries, about whom they were unsure and therefore had to assume significant risk. Risk taking and trust became significant aspects of successful APT trade during the pandemic.

1) Reliable client-buyers: direct shipping from a Chinese factory to a regional buyer.

Lomé informal workers are famous for the ways in which they avoid paying taxes to the state and tariffs at the border. It was the latter ruse that gave them an advantage in allying with APT traders during Covid at a time when the APT trade was otherwise blocked. Whether moving APT through the official border between Togo and Ghana, a large gate by the seaside, at reduced cost, or smuggling it 'under the fences', it was informal traders and porters who kept the cloth moving at very cheap prices. In the process, Nanette traders discovered that they could not only move their product but could also save money by developing their ties to the informal sector, a practice which

has endured beyond the pandemic. Moreover, whereas before Nanettes handed their cloth to traders at the border who conveyed it to clients in Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Benin and Nigeria, thus losing control of profits along the way, they now work with small informal sellers who work directly for them, no longer for their foreign clients. This allows Nanettes to increase their profits.

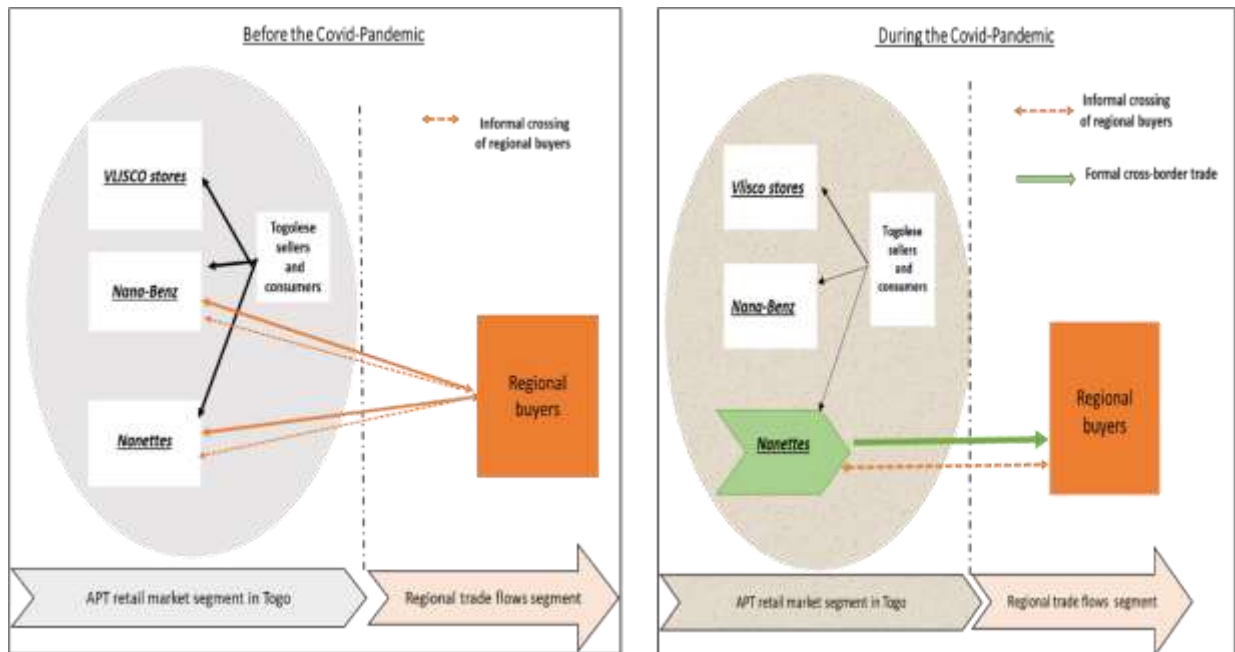
Covid-19 thus produced a new set of APT business practices, which fed off those thousands of small, informal actors on both sides of the border selling their products in order to sustain themselves. While informality itself is far from recent, its transformation and intensification during the pandemic, and the effects of these transformations on this South–South APT chain, were unprecedented.

Of the 25 Nanettes I interviewed, 18 of them at the time of the interview had buyers in other West African countries. Before the pandemic, they routed everything from China through Lomé, then turned their merchandise over to cross-border traders who conveyed it to other West African countries. When these cross-border traders disappeared during the pandemic, these Nanettes had to improvise.

Among those I worked with closely was a Nanette (NN-1) who not only turned to the informal sector but also further developed her contacts with buyers in Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria, buyers she had known previously but with whom she had never done regular business. This Nanette knew that there was still demand for APT in these countries during the pandemic and that they didn't have the stock or access to the Chinese market that she had. Since she had a strong personal network with her supplier in China, she was able to continue to place orders for APT and – her Covid adaptation – deliver them directly to trading partners in these other countries, something she had never done before the pandemic. And because of the strength of some of these markets, she was able to demand full payment before the delivery of each container. In 2022, she continued to do this with her cross-border buyers, but especially with those in Côte d'Ivoire, a huge APT market. She intends to continue this practice and plans to open her own store in Abidjan. By expanding her trade across the border during the pandemic and cutting out all these smaller cross-border traders, she maintained a large and successful business, and reported that she made more profit than before.

The shifts in national and regional APT trade brought about by the pandemic are represented in Figure 1, highlighting the way in which Nana-Benz lost their regional market, while Nanettes enhanced theirs.

Figure 1: National and regional trends in APT value chains, before and during the pandemic



Source: Author's compilation.

2) *Risk taking with regional buyers.* Other Nanettes were not able to acquire direct trade partners like this trader and were drawn into a more risky business. Nanettes I spoke with said that, because of the absence of sub-regional traders in Lomé, they were obliged to enter into ventures with partners they did not know well (interviews, NN-1, NN-2, NN-9, NN-15). One (NN-9) sent a Ghanaian trade partner in Accra's large Makola market a container of Hitarget that she was unable to sell in Togo, but she was nervous throughout because she had to reimburse the bank for her loan and did not have any choice but to trust that her Ghanaian buyer would pay her back. She conditioned the sending of these goods on the transfer of a deposit to her bank account of half the total amount – the most she was able to negotiate – before sending the goods. But would she recover the rest? In this instance, she did. But some of the Nanettes were not as fortunate and had to sell their cloth below purchase price.

The role of risk and trust (Pasquali et al, 2021) were constant topics of conversation with these Nanettes. They worried about the risks of not being reimbursed and were forever searching for partners they could trust. While these two aspects of their work were heightened during the pandemic – because of the new cross-border nature of

their trade – they have long been a feature of Global South trade, where networks of debt and credit define their business.

These, then, are different, novel strategies adopted by Nanette traders in response to the pandemic, strategy number two opening them to the regional, strategy number one refusing it altogether. This diversity, and the freedom and autonomy to create, is one of the Nanettes' signatures, and that of a trader-driven APT chain; it stands in contrast to the rigidity of the Nana-Benz and that of the North–South APT value chain.

The important point to emphasise here is that these diverse strategies and the experimentation they enabled were open to Nanette traders because, despite their being million-dollar enterprises, they are often single-person operations and can improvise as they choose. By contrast, Nana-Benz traders working for a Dutch lead firm can never buy or sell goods on credit or improvise, because the company forbids credit buying and the freedom that accompanies improvisation. This put Nana traders at a disadvantage during a crisis moment, when credit relations defined the market and allowed it to continue to function, and when playing with risk became necessary to survival.

It is also important to underline the way in which, for Nanettes who chose the regional option, the cross-border trade became a refuge and an opportunity. When sales were blocked at home, Nanettes exploited networks in neighbouring countries which kept their businesses afloat and, in some cases, enhanced it. This value chain adaptation also suggests the emergence of a new regionalism in this West African value chain, and perhaps the consolidation of greater power in the hands of the trader. Before the pandemic, she traded at home, in Togo, and handed products to others at the border who carried them on and sold them on their own terms. But during the pandemic Nanettes began to organise the conveying of their goods all the way to their end point, whether Makola market in Accra or Treichville in Abidjan. This long arm of distribution gave her greater profit and more control.

6 North-South and South-South value chain governance during the pandemic

Historically, GVC scholarship has focused on North–South GVCs, typically chains in which Southern sites of manufacture produce products for Northern consumption. Following this trajectory, much of the emerging literature on the impact of the pandemic on GVCs has followed the same research bias, with a predominant focus on the way in which North–South GVCs responded to Covid. This paper reverses the lens, with its focus on a Southern context and on value chains in which production originates

in the North (or a developed equivalent like China) and consumption takes place in the South. The aim of this paper has been to study the impact of Covid in a Southern environment where both North–South and South–South chains intersect, and to explore the way in which each chain responded differently to the pandemic. It is my argument that each chain’s diverse governance structure played a key role in how the chain responded to crisis conditions, and to a context in which informal trade dominates, with trader-led governance of the South–South value chain proving more adaptable.

6.1 A classic North–South chain during the pandemic: inflexible and rigid, unable to innovate

The buyer-driven governance regime of Togo’s North–South APT value chain is hierarchical and vertically integrated, with all decisions made by the Dutch owner, a lead firm which has not off-shored production and is still producing its own APT. Governance is defined by managerial control, flowing from managers to subordinates, and from headquarters to subsidiaries and affiliates (Gereffi et al, 2005, p 84). While this governance structure may work in other contexts, and indeed appeared advantageous in a different Southern context in responding to Covid (Pasquali & Godfrey, 2021), it was not ideal for dealing with the pandemic in Togo. Its top-down hierarchical structure gave it a rigidity which made it hard to operate in a context defined by networks and informal markets. It did not allow innovation or business strategy to come from the street, where much commercial innovation originates in West Africa, and it had few horizontal networks to draw on. Moreover, despite the product’s prestige, the company’s tight rules on distribution meant that only a small number of traders were able to distribute Vlisco’s product, under very controlled conditions. This closed and protected North–South chain proved unable to adapt to the Covid crisis without disrupting the essential functioning of the firm. This lack of flexibility and rigidity also made it difficult for Nana-Benz traders who distribute cloth for this value chain to compete with flexible Nanette traders.

6.2 A South–South chain: flexibility, innovation and resilience thanks to its networked nature and trader-led governance

The South–South APT value chain, unlike the North–South chain, is based on networks of actors. Unlike the Dutch chain, this trader-led value chain is more fragmented, with the supplier-manufacturer different from the distributor(s). These distributors are traders who can easily adapt to changes in the market, including the coming and going of regional buyers, and who did so during the pandemic. In analytical terms, this type

of governance is diffuse, market-driven and rhizomatic⁴. The complexity of information exchanged is relatively low, transactions are governed with little explicit coordination, and the cost of switching to new partners also remains low (Gereffi et al, 2005). This means that the flexibility with which traders in such a value chain were operating provided those who were clever with the opportunity to remain resilient during a pandemic season in which there was a shortage of liquidity at home and of APT containers arriving from China.

The flexibility of the South–South trader thus stands in opposition to the rigid, rule-driven conditions of traders in the North–South chain, who are bound to the lead firm. There is no lead firm in these South–South chains, only a trader who fulfils some, though not all, of the functions of the lead firm. While there is a trade partnership between the supplier and the trader, the trader is not attached to a specific supplier and remains flexible and adaptable to market, in this case pandemic, conditions. Moreover, as mentioned above, the trader of Chinese APT can also retail Dutch APT to maintain her market and adapt to crisis conditions, a practice which took place during Covid but whose inverse is forbidden to those Nana-Benz who trade for the Dutch firm and are forbidden to sell Chinese APT. Another way of putting this is to say that all is permitted with trader-driven – diffuse, rhizomatic – governance, and these traders use all means at their disposal to distribute APT; the same cannot be said of lead-firm-governed APT chains.

These data also show that in this South–South context, the interlinkages between formal and informal dimensions of APT GVCs were enhanced during Covid, and that the increased linkage between the two came about through pressure on traders that was both public and private. In other words, the Togolese state’s protective measures during Covid, including interdictions on public gatherings – where APT fashion is worn – and the closing of the borders, as well as Vlisco’s imposing restrictive new rules on its traders, produced trader innovation and a greater reliance on informal structures of governance.

This openness to the informal blurs the boundary between formal and informal domains, with consequences for value chain governance. Because informal governance largely evades both private and public controls and is informal, rhizomatic, distributed and modular, Nanettes were able to circumvent border closures, find new customers and open new networks. In a sense, these traders are constantly reinventing the

⁴ By rhizomatic, I mean that the value chain is self-organizing, dynamic, horizontal, and non-hierarchical.

structure and governance of their value chains, which lends them flexibility in times of challenge. Moreover, during the pandemic, restrictions and closures became an opportunity and informality became a positive resource. This finding should not be surprising on a continent where a majority of enterprises are informal in nature.

7 Conclusion

The literature on GVCs and Covid has largely focused on North–South value chains rather than on chains that reside within the Global South. My research attempts to fill this gap through a case study of value chains in the Global South. But more than simply filling a gap, this research attempts to offer a diagnostic of two diverse value chains, one North–South, the other South–South, and suggests that the governance structure of the Southern chain was better adapted to dealing with the pandemic. The North–South value chain underwent a serious crisis, retreating and risking collapse, because this chain is vertically integrated and lead-firm governed. When local liquidity disappeared and consumers were no longer able to afford expensive Dutch cloth, it proved incapable of adjusting to the moment. On the other hand, the Chinese trader-governed chain survived and flourished.

In particular, I have suggested that the inbuilt flexibility of this South–South chain – a flexibility keyed to the precarity of commercial life in the Global South (Meagher & Lindell, 2013; Siegmann & Schiphorst, 2016) – enabled traders to adapt to the pandemic moment by increasingly turning to the informal, a domain they have always relied on but an engagement that was now intensified and enhanced. At the same time, they turned to the zone of the cross-border. These two adaptations in turn produced what I am referring to as a new regionalism in APT South–South GVCs. Such regionalism has also brought about greater trader control over APT supply chains and a consolidation of trader power.

While I have focused here on questions of governance structure in South–South chains, it would also be interesting to take up some of the other issues raised in the North–South GVC–Covid literature in this Southern context. Namely, how did South–South chains deal with value chain supply shortages? A partial answer is revealed in the short section on Social Media above (p.15), whereby Togolese traders abandoned earlier habits of travel to China and began to customise their product and place orders by mobile phone, thereby keeping their stock moving, albeit at a slower pace than before. Another small advantage of South–South chains during the pandemic was that, when face masks were in short supply, chain actors were quickly able to pivot and begin manufacturing their own PPE. Again, the flexibility of these chains and their actors would appear to have given them an advantage in the face of supply shortages. It

remains to be seen whether other innovations in APT chain shortages emerged at this time and whether non-APT value chains in West Africa exhibited similar improvisational ability.

References

- Anner, M. (2020). Power relations in global supply chains and the unequal distribution of costs during crises: Abandoning garment suppliers and workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. *International Labour Review*, 161(1), 59–82. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ilr.12337>
- Baldwin, R. E., & Evenett, S. (2020). *Covid-19 and trade policy why turning inward won't work*. CEPR Press VoxEU.org eBook. <https://voxeu.org/content/covid-19-and-trade-policywhy-turning-inward-won-t-work>.
- Bamber, P., Fernandez-Stark, K., & Taglioni, D. (2020). *Four reasons why globalized production helps meet demand spikes: The case of medical devices and personal and protective equipment*. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/developmenttalk/four-reasons-why-globalized-production-helps-meet-demand-spikes-case-medical>
- Baoua, I. (2020). CILSS-RPCA: Impact de la crise du COVID-19 sur la sécurité alimentaire et nutritionnelle au Sahel et en Afrique de l'Ouest. *Rim-Rural*. <https://rim-rural.org/2020/05/13/impact-de-la-crise-du-covid-19-sur-la-securite-alimentaire-et-nutritionnelle-au-sahel-et-en-afrique-de-louest/>
- Barlow, P., van Schalkwyk, M. C., McKee, M., Labonté, R., & Stuckler, D. (2021). COVID-19 and the collapse of global trade: Building an effective public health response. *The Lancet Planetary Health*, 5(2), e102–e107. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196\(20\)30291-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196(20)30291-6)
- Barrientos, S. (2019). *Gender and Work in Global Value Chains: Capturing the Gains?* Cambridge University Press.
- Barrientos, S., Gereffi, G., & Rossi, A. (2011). Economic and social upgrading in global production networks: A new paradigm for a changing world. *International Labour Review*, 150(3–4), 319–340. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1564-913X.2011.00119.x>
- Benjamin, N., Golub, S., & Mbaye, A. A. (2015). Informality, Trade Policies and Smuggling in West Africa. *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 30(3), 381–394. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08865655.2015.1068203>
- Benjamin, N., & Mbaye, A. A. (2012). *The Informal Sector in Francophone Africa: Firm Size, Productivity, and Institutions*. World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/9364>
- Bensassi, S., Jarreau, J., & Mitaritonna, C. (2019). Regional Integration and Informal Trade in Africa: Evidence from Benin's Borders. *Journal of African Economies*, 28(1), 89–118. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jae/ejy016>
- Bernard, R. (2002). *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches, Sixth Edition*. <https://rowman.com/ISBN/9781442268883/Research-Methods-in-Anthropology-Qualitative-and-Quantitative-Approaches-Sixth-Edition>

- Bisson, L., & Hambleton, T. (2020). *COVID-19 Impact on West African Value Chains*. Clingendael Institute. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep25675>
- Brown, C. (2020). *China should export more medical gear to battle COVID-19* | PIIE. <https://www.piie.com/blogs/trade-and-investment-policy-watch/china-should-export-more-medical-gear-battle-covid-19>
- Carr, M., & Chen, M. (2001). *Globalization and the informal economy: How global trade and investment impact on the working poor* [Working paper]. http://www.ilo.org/employment/Whatwedo/Publications/WCMS_122053/lang-en/index.htm
- Charmes, J. (2012). The Informal Economy Worldwide: Trends and Characteristics. *Margin: The Journal of Applied Economic Research*, 6(2), 103–132. <https://doi.org/10.1177/097380101200600202>
- Chen, H., Qian, W., & Wen, Q. (2021). The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Consumption: Learning from High-Frequency Transaction Data. *AEA Papers and Proceedings*, 111, 307–311. <https://doi.org/10.1257/pandp.20211003>
- Dallas, M. P., Horner, R., & Li, L. (2021). The mutual constraints of states and global value chains during COVID-19: The case of personal protective equipment. *World Development*, 139, 105324. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2020.105324>
- Edwards, R., & Holland, J. (2013). *What is Qualitative Interviewing?* (Bloomsbury books). A&C Black.
- Fortunato, P. (2020). *How COVID-19 is changing global value chains* | UNCTAD. <https://unctad.org/news/how-covid-19-changing-global-value-chains>
- Friedberg, A. L. (2020). An Answer to Aggression. *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2020. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2020-08-11/ccp-answer-aggression>
- Garba, F., & Yeboah, T. (2022). Free Movement and Regional Integration in the ECOWAS Sub-Region. In J. K. Teye (Ed.), *Migration in West Africa: IMISCOE Regional Reader* (pp. 19–34). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-97322-3_2
- Gereffi, G. (1999). A commodity chains framework for analyzing global industries. *Institute of Development Studies*, 8(12), 1–9.
- Gereffi, G. (2001). Beyond the Producer-driven/Buyer-driven Dichotomy The Evolution of Global Value Chains in the Internet Era. *IDS Bulletin*, 32(3), 30–40. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1759-5436.2001.mp32003004.x>
- Gereffi, G. (2018). *Global Value Chains and Development: Redefining the Contours of 21st Century Capitalism*. Cambridge University Press.

- Gereffi, G. (2019). Economic upgrading in global value chains. *Handbook on Global Value Chains*, 240–254.
- Gereffi, G. (2020). What does the COVID-19 pandemic teach us about global value chains? The case of medical supplies. *Journal of International Business Policy*, 3(3), 287–301. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s42214-020-00062-w>
- Gereffi, G. (2021). Increasing resilience of medical supply chains during the COVID-19 pandemic. *UNIDO Industrial Analytics Platform*.
- Gereffi, G. (1994a). The international economy and economic development. *The Handbook of Economic Sociology*, 206–233.
- Gereffi, G., Humphrey, J., & Sturgeon, T. (2005). The governance of global value chains. *Review of International Political Economy*, 12(1), 78–104. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09692290500049805>
- Gibbon, P. (2008). Governance, entry barriers, upgrading: A re-interpretation of some GVC concepts from the experience of African clothing exports. *Competition & Change*, 12(1), 29–48.
- Given, L. M. (2008). *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*. SAGE Publications.
- Gnamke, E. W. (2020). COVID-19: État des lieux et stratégie de riposte au Togo. *Togo Politique*. <https://togopolitique.org/etat-des-lieux-et-strategie-de-riposte/>
- Horner, R., & Nadvi, K. (2018). Global value chains and the rise of the Global South: Unpacking twenty-first century polycentric trade. *Global Networks*, 18(2), 207–237.
- Hufford, A. (2020). WSJ News Exclusive | 3M CEO on N95 Masks: 'Demand Exceeds Our Production Capacity.' *Wall Street Journal*. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/3m-ceo-on-n95-masks-demand-exceeds-our-production-capacity-11585842928>
- Humphrey, J., & Schmitz, H. (2001). Governance in Global Value Chains. *IDS Bulletin*, 32(3), 19–29. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1759-5436.2001.mp32003003.x>
- Hutchinson, F. E., & Bhattacharya, P. (2020). Malaysia's rubber glove industry—a silver lining amidst dark clouds. *ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute*, 138. <https://www.think-asia.org/handle/11540/12884>
- Ikechi, K. S., Chinedum, A. H., & Nwokoro, N. A. (2022). Trade Relations and Trade Openness amongst the ECOWAS Member Nations. *International Journal of Management Science and Business Administration*, 8(2), 33–47. <https://doi.org/10.18775/ijmsba.1849-5664-5419.2014.82.1004>
- ILO. (2015). *Five facts about informal economy in Africa* [October 10, 2021]. http://www.ilo.org/africa/whats-new/WCMS_377286/lang--en/index.htm
- ILO. (2018a, April 30). *More than 60 per cent of the world's employed population are in the informal economy* [October 10, 2021]. International Labour Organization.

http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_627189/lang-en/index.htm

ILO. (2018b). *World Employment Social Outlook Trends 2018*.

Kabeer, N., Razavi, S., & van der Meulen Rodgers, Y. (2021). Feminist Economic Perspectives on the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Feminist Economics*, 27(1–2), 1–29. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13545701.2021.1876906>

Kaplinsky, R. (2000). Globalisation and unequalisation: What can be learned from value chain analysis? *Journal of Development Studies*, 37(2), 117–146.

Kawulich, B. B. (2005). Participant observation as a data collection method. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 6(2).

Lappok, J. (2020, January 31). *Surgical gown recall leaves medical centers scrambling*. News Talk 94.1/AM 1600. <https://newstalk941.com/surgical-gown-recall-leaves-medical-centers-scrambling/>

Lighthizer, R. E. (2020). How to Make Trade Work for Workers. *Foreign Affairs*, 99, 78.

Liu, L. (2020). 700 Tech Companies in China Have Begun Making Masks. *EE Times*. <https://www.eetimes.com/700-tech-companies-in-china-have-begun-making-masks/>

Mbaye, A., & Diagne, C. (2020). *Covid-19: L'Afrique de l'Ouest à l'assaut de l'économie informelle*. Le Point. https://www.lepoint.fr/afrique/covid-19-afrique-de-l-ouest-faire-de-l-economie-informelle-un-atout-08-05-2020-2374684_3826.php

Meagher, K. (2007). Manufacturing Disorder: Liberalization, Informal Enterprise and Economic 'Ungovernance' in African Small Firm Clusters. *Development and Change*, 38(3), 473–503. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7660.2007.00420.x>

Meagher, K., & Lindell, I. (2013). ASR Forum: Engaging with African informal Economies: Social Inclusion or Adverse Incorporation? Introduction. *African Studies Review*, 56(3), 57–76. <https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2013.79>

Medina, L., Jonelis, M. A. W., & Cangul, M. (2017). *The Informal Economy in Sub-Saharan Africa: Size and Determinants*. International Monetary Fund.

Miroudot, S. (2020). Reshaping the policy debate on the implications of COVID-19 for global supply chains. *Journal of International Business Policy*, 3(4), 430–442. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s42214-020-00074-6>

Morris, M., Staritz, C., & Barnes, J. (2011). *Value chain dynamics, local embeddedness, and upgrading in clothing sectors in Lesotho and Swaziland*. *International Journal of Technological Learning Innovation and Development*, 4(1), 96–119.

Nachum, L. (2021). *Global Pandemics and the Economics of Value Chains: COVID-19 and the Production of Medical Devices - ProQuest*. <https://www.proquest.com/openview/fdfae670d7ee3e2929793846b20752b9/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=2034428>

- Okolo, J. E. (1988). Obstacles to Increased Intra-Ecowas Trade. *International Journal*, 44(1), 171–214. <https://doi.org/10.2307/40202583>
- Oldekop, J. A., Horner, R., Hulme, D., Adhikari, R., Agarwal, B., Alford, M., Bakewell, O., Banks, N., Barrientos, S., Bastia, T., Bebbington, A. J., Das, U., Dimova, R., Duncombe, R., Enns, C., Fielding, D., Foster, C., Foster, T., Frederiksen, T., ... Zhang, Y.-F. (2020). COVID-19 and the case for global development. *World Development*, 134, 105044. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2020.105044>
- Pasquali, G., & Godfrey, S. (2021). Governance of Eswatini Apparel Regional Value Chains and the Implications of Covid-19. *The European Journal of Development Research*, 34(1), 473–502. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41287-021-00383-3>
- Pasquali, G., Krishnan, A., & Alford, M. (2021). Multichain strategies and economic upgrading in global value chains: Evidence from Kenyan horticulture. *World Development*, 146, 105598. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2021.105598>
- Ponte, S., Sturgeon, T. J., & Dallas, M. P. (2019). Governance and power in global value chains. *Handbook on Global Value Chains*, 120–137.
- Resnick, D., Spencer, E., & Siwale, T. (2020). *Informal traders and COVID-19 in Africa: An opportunity to strengthen the social contract*. IGC. <https://www.theigc.org/publication/informal-traders-and-covid-19-in-africa-an-opportunity-to-strengthen-the-social-contract/>
- Santacreu, A. M., & LaBelle, J. (2021). Rethinking Global Value Chains During COVID-19: Part 2. *Economic Synopses*, 2021(17). <https://doi.org/10.20955/es.2021.17>
- Siegmann, K. A., & Schiphorst, F. (2016). Understanding the globalizing precariat: From informal sector to precarious work. *Progress in Development Studies*, 16(2), 111–123. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464993415623118>
- UNCTAD. (2020). *The coronavirus shock: A story of another global crisis foretold - what policymakers should be doing about it* (GDS/INFO No. 1). UNCTAD. https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/gds_tdr2019_update_coronavirus.pdf
- Wague, C. (2020). *Economic Update for Togo: The Coronavirus Is Exerting Pressure on the Economy*. World Bank. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/togo/publication/economic-update-for-togo-the-coronavirus-is-exerting-pressure-on-the-economy>

Appendix: Comprehensive List of APT Interviews

Nana-Benz

Name (anonymised)	Interview no	Interview format	Interviewee gender	Interview date	Interview locale	Interview frequency
Ayivon	NB-1	Face-to-face and phone	F	20 Nov 2020–26 Apr 2021	Lomé Assigamé market	Many times
Ahlonkonba	NB-2	Face-to-face	F	12 Mar 2021–19 July 2022	Lomé Assigamé	2
Dos-reis	NB-3	Face-to-face	F	9 July 2020	Lomé Assigamé	1
Linda	NB-4	Phone	F	18 July 2021	–	1
Sophie	NB-5	Face-to-face	F	8 Dec 2020	Lomé Assigamé	1
De Souza	NB-6	Phone	F	9 Dec 2020	–	1
Tsotsovi	NB-7	Face-to-face	F	17 Sept 2020–27 Nov 2020	Lomé Assigamé	2
Amivi	NB-8	Face-to-face	F	14 May 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Ayoko	NB-9	Face-to-face	F	9 June 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Alipui	NB-10	Face-to-face	F	11 Dec 2020; 1 July 2021	Lomé Assigamé	2
Wilson	NB-11	Phone	F	12 Dec 2020	–	1
Gomez	NB-12	Face-to-face	F	16 Nov 2020	Lomé Assigamé	1

Nanettes

Name (anonymised)	Interview no	Interview format	Interviewee gender	Interview date	Interview locale	Interview frequency
Adangbeton	NN-1	Face-to-face and phone	F	July 2020– Aug 2021; July 2022	Lomé Assigamé	Many times
Alidja	NN-2	Face-to-face	F	2 Feb 2021; 3 Mar 2021; 29 Aug 2021	Lomé Assigamé	3
Noellie	NN-3	Face-to-face and phone	F	July 2020–2 Sept 2021; July 2022	Lomé Assigamé	Many times
Abide	NN-4	Phone	F	12 Sept 2020	–	1
Da Sylvia	NN-5	Face-to-face	F	24 Sept 2020	Lomé Assigamé	1
Mouniratou	NN-6	Face-to-face	F	29 Nov and 20 Dec 2020	Lomé Assigamé	2
Fatima	NN-7	Phone	F	5 Jan 2021	–	1
Ma Ruky	NN-8	Face-to-face	F	25 Jan 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Dopevi	NN-9	Face-to-face	F	7 May 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Rama	NN-10	Face-to-face	F	13 May 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Tontonvi	NN-11	Face-to-face	F	26 May 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Tata Dédé	NN-12	Face-to-face	F	21 June 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Neneto	NN-13	Phone	F	6 Aug 2021	–	1
Victoire	NN-14	Face-to-face	F	14 July 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Fifi	NN-15	Phone	F	27 July 2020	Lomé Assigamé	1

Davi Julia	NN-16	Face-to-face	F	28 July 2020	Lomé Assigamé	1
Da Adjo	NN-17	Phone	F	29 July 2020	–	1
Beneto	NN-18	Face- to-face	F	8 May 2021	Lomé Assigamé	2
Dakaka	NN-19	Face-to-face	F	20 Apr 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Aline	NN-20	phone	F	15 Aug 2021	–	1
Dodo	NN-21	phone	F	20 Aug 2021	–	1
Dometo	NN-22	phone	F	30 Aug 2021	–	1
Dapopo	NN-23	phone	F	1 Sept 2021	–	1
Ayele	NN-24	Phone	F	3 Sept 2021	–	1
Flavienne	NN-25	Face-to-face	F	21 Mar 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1

Sellers

Name (anonymised)	Interview no	Interview type	Interviewee gender	Interview date	Interview locale	Interview frequency
Seybou	S-1	Face-to-face	M	23 April 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Aimée	S-2	Face-to-face	F	23 April 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Mawugnon	S-3	Face-to-face	F	29 April 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Souleyman	S-4	Face-to-face	M	29 April 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Dachristie	S-5	Face-to-face	F	30 April 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1

Abelnon	S-6	Face-to-face	F	1 May 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Fatisro	S-7	Face-to-face	F	1 May 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Christelle	S-8	Face-to-face	F	3 May 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Massawudu	S-9	Face-to-face	M	3 May 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Abide	S-10	Face-to-face	F	5 May 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Tanti	S-11	Face-to-face	F	5 May 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Jacque	S-12	Face-to-face	F	6 May 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Ayawavi	S-13	Face-to-face	F	6 May 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Lezovi	S-14	Face-to-face	F	7 May 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Dafinevi	S-15	Face-to-face	F	20 May 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Grace	S-16	Face-to-face	F	29 May 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Adakouvi	S-17	Face-to-face	F	5 June 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1

Mazalou	S-18	Face-to-face	F	22 June 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Abiguail	S-19	Face-to-face	F	23 July 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Philo	S-20	Face-to-face	F	30 Aug 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1

Street Sellers

Name (anonymised)	Interview no	Interview type	Interviewee gender	Interview date	Interview locale	Interview frequency
Dagan	SS-1	Face-to-face	F	9 June 2020; 20 Sept 2020	Lomé neighbourhood	2
Dayovo	SS-2	Face-to-face	F	10 June 2020	Lomé neighbourhood	1
Adjoko	SS-3	Face-to-face	F	14 Dec 2020; 12 Feb 2021	Lomé Assigamé	2
Amelenon	SS-4	Face-to-face	F	21 Jan 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Reine	SS-5	Face-to-face	F	21 Jan 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Afi	SS-6	Face-to-face	F	21 Jan 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1

Vida	SS-7	Face-to-face	F	21 Jan 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Tassigan	SS-8	Face-to-face	F	1 Mar 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Akossiwa	SS-9	Face-to-face	F	12 Mar 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Bèrè	SS-10	Face-to-face	F	12 Mar 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Ablavi	SS-11	Face-to-face	F	13 Mar 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Solange	SS-12	Face-to-face	F	13 Mar 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Aicha	SS-13	Face-to-face	F	30 Mar 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Dadovi	SS-14	Face-to-face	F	31 Mar 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Venavinon	SS-15	Face-to-face	F	8 April 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Kayi	SS-16	Face-to-face	F	9 April 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Carolle	SS-17	Face-to-face	F	10 April 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Dede	SS-18	Face-to-face	F	21 April 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1

Toto	SS-19	Face-to-face	F	21 April 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Mama Abou	SS-20	Face-to-face	F	23 April 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Davicky	SS-21	Face-to-face	F	24 April 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Unknown	SS-22	Face-to-face	F	5 May 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Wetawou	SS-23	Face-to-face	F	5 May 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Unknown	SS-24	Face-to-face	F	7 May 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Gladys	SS-25	Face-to-face	F	7 May 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Bellavi	SS-26	Face-to-face	F	8 May 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Abdoulaye	SS-27	Face-to-face	M	15 May 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Ali	SS-28	Face-to-face	M	15 May 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Unknown	SS-29	Face-to-face	F	18 May 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1

Cherita	SS-30	Face-to-face	F	18 May 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Nanagan	SS-31	Face-to-face	F	19 May 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Sistergan	SS-32	Face-to-face	F	19 May 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Unknown	SS-33	Face-to-face	F	25 May 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Latevi	SS-34	Face-to-face	M	25 May 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Lydia	SS-35	Face-to-face	F	25 May 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Tessie	SS-36	Face-to-face	F	27 May 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Adike	SS-37	Face-to-face	F	30 May 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Tassiga	SS-38	Face-to-face	F	30 May 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Massalou	SS-39	Face-to-face	F	30 May 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1
Justine	SS-40	Face-to-face	F	30 May 2021	Lomé Assigamé	1

Other Traders

Name (anonymised)	Interview no	Interview type	Interviewee gender	Interview date	Interview locale	Interview frequency
Vlisco employee 1	OT-1	Face-to face	F	5 Oct 2020; 14 Jan 2021	Vlisco shop, Lomé	2
Vlisco employee 2	OT-2	Face-to-face and phone	M	Sept 2020– Aug 2021; Call in 2022	Lomé Assigamé	Many times
Vlisco employee 3	OT-3	Phone	M	18 June 2022	–	1
Indian trader 1	OT-4	Face-to face	M	20 Aug 2020	Lomé Assigamé	1
Indian trader 2	OT-5	Face-to-face	M	26 Aug 2020	Lomé; Outside Assigamé	1
Lebanese trader	OT-6	Face-to -face	M	2 Sept 2020	Lomé, outside Assigamé	1

Trade Professionals

Port broker 1	TP-1	Face-to-face	M	24 Jan 2021	Lomé; Near Assigamé	1
Port broker 2	TP-2	Phone	M	6 April 2021	Lomé port	1
National revenue service official 1	TP-3	Face-to-face	M	13 July 2020	Lomé	1
National revenue service official 2	TP-4	Face-to-face	F	14 July 2020	Lomé	1
Former Togolese	TP-5	Face-to-face	M	30 July 2020	Lomé	1

APT factory employee						
Port official 1	TP-6	Face-to-face	M	10 Aug 2020	Lomé	1
Port official 2	TP-7	Face-to-face	M	12 Aug 2020	Lomé	1
Port official 3	TP-8	Face-to-face	M	12 Aug 2020	Lomé	1
National statistics service employee	TP-9	Face-to-face	M	19 Aug 2020	Lomé	1
Togolese trade ministry employee	TP-10	Face-to-face	M	21 Aug 2018	Lomé	1
Togolese trade ministry employee	TP-11	Face-to-face	M	21 Aug 2020	Lomé	1